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FRIENDS TO THIS GROUND, A STATEMENT FOR READERS, TEACHERS, AND WRITERS OF LITERATURE.

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PUB DATE 67

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.25 HC-$1.76 42P.

DESCRIPTORS- *ENGLISH INSTRUCTION, *LITERATURE, *READING, CULTURAL ENRICHMENT, IMAGINATION, LITERATURE PROGRAMS, CULTURAL BACKGROUND,

IN A TIME WHEN SYSTEMATIC KNOWLEDGE AND SPECIALIZATION ARE ON THE ASCENT, PARTICULARLY WITHIN OUR SCHOOLS, IT IS IMPORTANT THAT THOSE WHO VALUE LITERATURE BE ABLE TO ARTICULATE EFFECTIVELY ITS PROPER PLACE IN EDUCATION AND IN LIFE. WHILE MULTITUDINOUS ARGUMENTS CAN BE ASSEMBLED IN THE DEFENSE OF LITERATURE AS AN IMPORTANT PART OF A NATION'S CULTURAL LIFE AND EDUCATIONAL CURRICULUM, THEY SOMETIMES DEFEAT ONE ANOTHER OR IGNORE WHAT LITERATURE CAN UNIQUELY CONTRIBUTE TO HUMAN LIFE. THUS, LITERATURE IS SAID, ON THE ONE HAND, TO EMBODY OUR CULTURAL HERITAGE AND, ON THE OTHER, TO BE A SHAPING FORCE IN POLITICAL AND SOCIAL CHANGE. TO SOME IT SEEMS TO PROVIDE PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SOCIOLOGICAL INSIGHTS, WHEREAS OTHERS VIEW IT AS THE SOURCE OF "EMOTIONAL SURGES AND TONES" WHICH BEAR NO RELATION TO EVERYDAY REALITY OR THE ANATOMY OF THE HUMAN PSYCHE. SOMETIMES IGNORED, HOWEVER, IS THE UNIQUE EXPERIENCE WHICH THE INFORMED AND SENSITIVE READING OF LITERATURE CAN GENERATE--AN EXPERIENCE OF DISCOVERY, COMPLEXITY, AND INSIGHT WHICH HEIGHTENS THE INHERENT AND UNIQUELY HUMAN QUALITIES OF PERCEPTION AND REFLECTION. IT IS AT THIS EXPERIENCE THAT THE LINES OF DEFENSE MIGHT BEST BE DRAWN. FOR THE OPENNESS, SENSITIVITY, IMAGINATION, AND ENERGETIC INTELLIGENCE NECESSARY FOR AND INTENSIFIED BY THE RESPONSIVE READING OF LITERATURE ARE THE VERY QUALITIES NECESSARY FOR ENRICHED HUMAN LIFE. (DOCUMENT ALSO AVAILABLE FROM NATIONAL COUNCIL OF TEACHERS OF ENGLISH, CHAMPAIGN, ILL., ORDER NO. 36357, $1.00.) (DL)

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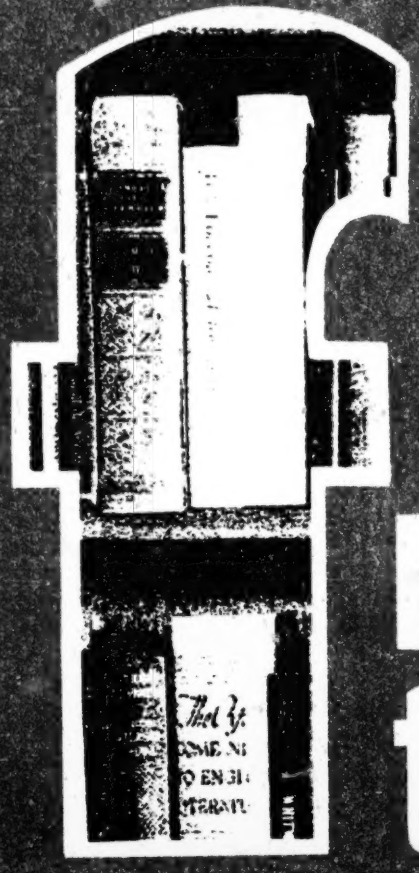

A Statement for Readers, Teachers, and Writers of Literature

riends to this ground

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A Statement for Readers, Teachers, and Writers of Literature...

riends to this ground

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A Statement of the Commission on Literature

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PREFACE

Today literature needs its friends.

Much recent effort in education emphasizes mathematics and sciences and the skills which can be measured and used for economic and social advancement. The place of literature in this new emphasis has not so much been contested as simply disregarded in successive adjustments to emergencies. Some actions, such as formation of the new National Endowment for the Arts and Humanities, have displayed recognition of a need to maintain balance in our society's efforts; but whether literature has in fact been adequately judged, whether it deserves to yield its old place, or to find a new one, has not been fully and carefully explored.

When the Commission on Literature for the National Council of Teachers of English began to realize the importance of this issue, they found that a change has been occurring, not only in the traditional part literature has had in the schools, but also in the nature of it as it survives: speed and efficiency, which loom as crucial in some studies, are being imposed on literature, and there is a question whether literature can withstand such treatment and remain the kind of human experience it has been. Commission members in their meetings began to sense a quality in literature that needed assertion and protection, and an increased valuing, even as conditions endangered it. This quality, however, the group found hard to define or assert or present effectively to others, or even to themselves.

The following statement is the Commission's attempt to identify

particular values in literature and to assess its place in the current swirl of adjustments in education, for the purpose of finding and helping to assure literature's appropriate place.

Members of the Commission all contributed to the discussions from which the statement derives, though they assigned the writing to one of their number; and he found it natural to turn to many articles in professional journals, which are in effect a continuing dialogue about literature, carried on by its teachers and practitioners, through the years, and in all parts of the world. The parts of that dialogue that can be ascribed to individuals are identified, with page references, at the end of the full statement.

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LITERATURE IN THE SUPER MARKET

Recently many educators, avid for quick results in mathematics, sciences, and production, have appeared ready to break up our culture and throw it at the moon. Those concerned about literature have in particular felt anguish as their subject, traditionally the center of culture and schooling, has been pushed aside, or in effect processed for the market, in successive adjustments to emergencies. The sensation is like that of standing on a wall and watching its foundations mined for embellishment of a facade.

For centuries the culture around us developed, as if by a magnificent chance, under the influence of free-ranging, imaginative enhancement of daily experiences, through the varying efforts of artists and other thinkers as they reworked those experiences into productions congenial to human life. But recent urgency has exacted from our culture a host of specialties in social studies and natural sciences, and has forced education into a spell of driving purpose. The result is that, difficult though it may be to explain in brief this product of tradition, such a complex and shimmering heritage as literature, its advocates now face the necessity of presenting for themselves and for others as clear a statement as possible about what their subject is, in light of current opinion, and how it is faring.

And even as this necessity looms, there is an irony. The more serious and concerned educators become, as they draft school time and national effort for selected, immediate purposes, the more their experts

in the separate fields of endeavor warn of the need for relief and imaginative freedom in attaining the fullest success even in practical affairs. At such a juncture a statement on literature could help to forestall its unwitting neglect as more clamorous subjects bid for time and effort. Such a statement could help rally those who see dangers in fragmenting education and aiming parts of it toward limited ends, under the influence of ill-considered impulses.

It must be admitted that in some respects the friends of literature have helped to make it vulnerable to its present troubles. For long these friends have conveniently identified literature as The Reservoir, the container of the cultural heritage. As such a container, literature enjoyed prestige, but it could be deprived of that prestige, as special studies claimed their parts. One of the inducements for a modern assessment of literature is that today its distinctive value has become more perceptible as man becomes dissatisfied with assuming his ideas to be derived from a reservoir. Literature holds a high place as a generator of values and insights. Human engagement with the materials of consciousness, the enhancement of simple experience by imaginative adjustment, looms as the central distinction of intellectual life; and literature is a great realm for that kind of activity. Subjected to modern analysis, our values, religions, laws, and truths of all kinds cannot any longer merely be ascribed to earlier sources. Attribution merely disguises the question of how first an element came into being. Once, we could account for what is in Homer, say, by assuming an earlier thinker, but who was the Homer before Homer? How did he get his ideas? Somewhere a creator or discoverer operated. And the cultivation of that vigorous life of discovery is now an important aim of those concerned with the cultivation and discriminating use of man's imaginative powers. Thus the kind of activity exemplified in literature is increasingly recognized:

> . . . the problem of expression is becoming a preoccupation of a great number of disciplines and is interpreted more and

more explicitly as a central problem of human existence. Many disciplines are converging more and more on the depths of man's interior, where literary creation takes place, even though this creation is in a sense a process of exteriorizing the interior.

Yet even as intimations of literature's role become stronger, a number of new influences in society sharpen the need for it while making it more difficult to attain as the kind of experience it has traditionally been. Something of the complexity involved will emerge from the following points, assembled and summarized from many sources:

1) Mass media, particularly television, have become the principal aesthetic-recreational activity of many people; the programs offered use up material so quickly that it is impossible for the programs to grow into fully satisfying art forms.

2) The material success of modern life induces movement, a worship of the new, and a rejection of tradition. The result for the individual may be a shallow and lonely life, bereft of participation in those literary experiences which appeal through traditional, measured creations.

3) Society today lives on a kind of introspection of the whole culture, which has an insatiable curiosity to investigate every aspect of psychological, sociological, and physiological life. No previous culture has been quite so intent on self-examination. Analysis disturbs our security, our feeling of unquestioning reliance on most parts of routine existence.

4) The decline of real religious commitment among the leaders and probably the mass of society forces a need onto other institutions as integrating factors in our social order. Two of the most appropriate integrating factors are education and literature.

5) As the young come to constitute a larger portion of society,

there is an accent on youth and a resultant lack of perspective about life and traditional values. Literature suffers in such a world, even as it comes to have more relevance.

6) The young in our time are hustled into activities and states of mind appropriate for aims other than their own; they lack the immersion in leisure and the opportunity for spontaneous impulse characteristic of earlier times. Literature offered for such people a chance to relive experiences, to distance them and compare them. In that kind of leisurely reading one could find the dimensions and harmonies natural to one's individual self.

In view of the creative potential in literature and in view of its perilous displacement in current living, those who know its value need to communicate to their society what it offers and what its potential is. Will it become an ornamental extra in the English classroom, taking second place to specialized skills of reading and communication? Will its place be occupied by training for competitive action in an ever more aimless society? Or will literature continue to have its place as the vital core of work in English and as one of the most pervasive of all cultural influences?

II

LITERATURE: TRADITIONAL AND CHANGING VIEWS

Literature has never lacked fervent allegiance. Almost every public ceremony draws on literature as part of its ritual. Man in every culture has created literature and responded to it. He feels that it gives a special and desirable quality of experience not achieved in any other way. Probably half of all adults, even in our hurried age, have a poem or a quotation tucked away in a purse, a wallet, a drawer. And there are probably today a greater number of people "trying to write" than at any other period.

Producing, cherishing, and circulating this resource has always attracted an influential group in society. Their most impressive assertions about the importance of literature have cited it as delivering the accumulated riches of the past: it embodies the cultural heritage. Impressive as that claim continues to be, the distinctive values of literature have begun to appear in a new light, as the quality of individual experience has come to occupy increasing attention. The following passages will demonstrate the trend, the first being from a context in which the issue is whether "great works" or more ordinary works reveal more about a society:

> . . . the crucial importance of literature to a student of society lies . . . in great works of literature. Although popular art and mass art may tell much about a society, great art tells infinitely more. In fact, the statement is tautologous. One of the ways of defining great art is to call it art that transcends the condi-

tions that gave it birth and so penetrates further into human experience, sees more, than those conditions promised. . . .

. . . quality of perception . . . is the crux of the matter; a capability to see not only individual instances but deeper and more long-term movements below the surface detail; an ability to unite dissimilars, to reveal a pattern out of a mass and a mess, like a magnet placed into iron filings. This quality is presumably the basis of any significant hypothesis in a discipline and so is shared by creative scientists; in no discipline is it a matter of simple aggregation.

Another writer asserts a certain kind of realization in literature: "The literary imagination makes it possible to know immediately and concretely, and with even a breathtaking fullness, what it is like to be a human being." It provides "feeling knowledge."

And even a list of objectives in the study of literature repeatedly hints at the qualitative aspect of the experience:

1) We can help young people understand themselves through the literature and the language activities that we present to them. . . . Through literature young people may gain those flashes of insight when they see that others have faced the same problems and have felt the same way about them.

2) We want to help young people see the color, the patterns, the quality of their environments. . . .

3) We want young people to cherish the ideals of their culture . . . the dignity of all kinds of work, of beauty of all religions, the importance of the individual, of the richness of family living, and the equality of all peoples.

4) We want to show young people how basic human instincts work themselves out under varying cultural patterns in many parts of the world. We want them to find out what it feels like to grow up in India, what life is like in Africa.

> 5) We want them to examine constantly the interactions between people to see how they live harmoniously or why they come into conflict with each other . . . so that they themselves will not be confined always and completely within themselves.

The writer of the above obviously relies on the content of literature, even as he searches for qualitative changes potential in the literary experience. He discusses animal stories as showing a lonely creature meeting and surmounting dangers in an alien world (just as young people need confidence), or maybe an animal acknowledges a youngster as master (even more helpful for the young reader); an adventure in which a man overcomes what menaces him will convey confidence, or a story may assure a youngster of his own normality by depicting others who worried about what worries him. These stories, it is asserted, free the reader to build a helpful "self-concept."

New Aspects of the Province of Literature

The content of literature by its very nature appeals to those who judge human affairs; as exemplified above, literature as reservoir commands respect. New insights, however, and new inroads as the social studies claim systematic dominance in particular areas of human life, have induced a different emphasis on the distinctive value of the literary imagination. One kind of holding action, more common in earlier times than now, is to point out that literature has always been for an elite:

> Though a sociologist may say that the traditional study of literature and the educational ideal it implies are inappropriate to a world of mass education, the teacher of literature will feel that he owes his first allegiance to the always relatively small number of students who will be the readers of high literature. They may have as little influence on the mass culture as did Milton on the culture of the Restoration, but it is important that they should exist as witnesses to the possibility of finer orderings of literature and life.

But more frequently today the values in literature are claimed for all:

> In this book I shall use the term "the poetic function." By this I mean the capacity to explore and perceive, to come to terms with, speak of, and deal with experience *by the exercise of the whole mind and all kinds of apprehensions, not only intellectual ones.* This poetic function, I consider, is neglected too much in all education and not least in the education of children deficient in intellect. I want to try to establish in this book that nourishing what I call the poetic function is certainly the most important work with less able children, and that the most efficient work a teacher of backward children *can* do is the free, informal, imaginative and often pleasurable and rewarding work of creative English, toward literacy and insight into personal and external reality.

Whether for an elite or for all, the values in literature are more and more identified as characteristic of a fountain rather than a reservoir; literature is seen as inducing a progressive experience which can improve taste as it increases life; the kind of experience it offers distinguishes it from those activities which merely bring about increments in knowledge without changing the person: ". . . good art teaching can save the children from the influence of ugliness. . . . Literature has as its goal to provide aesthetic enjoyment of the cultural heritage, the best that has been written and preserved through the ages. Literature fulfills human needs for growth, security, and beauty."

Judged in light of this emphasis, earlier apologists for literature have too often been content to rely on the imposing riches of "the cultural heritage," and have tended to neglect the distinctive transforming effect of literature. Wallace Stevens spoke of "the poem of the act of the mind": literature provides not just new content but an inducement for the fullest play of individual powers. A reader may enter a new order of experience in which his own powers are reinforced by a

harmony with progressions of thought and feeling, and the effect may transform even those readers commonly considered unavailable for literary experience:

> . . . creative work is a means of dispersing the "low-stream" child's sense of failure and inferiority—the needs of the sensibility and the perceptions of the psyche unite all, and such children understand this. . . . Creative activity is a constructive quest for a sense of meaning in experiences. But with the child, as with the adult artist, the "relief" goes with a sense of triumph, and lessening in inward pain. To fail to achieve expression goes as much with the deepening of anguish and anxiety.
>
> . . . Once one has experienced the disciplines and rigour of creativity oneself one should be able to give others a sense of the gravity, value and satisfaction of the process, and convey an attitude of respect to what emanates from it. If one does convey such attitudes, then good work will come—because the child will trust the teacher and the impersonal complex for creativity he has established. Unfortunately . . . we still despise what Bacon called "the theatre of the mind"—imagination and fancy—in favour of the "effective" intellect. The connection between essential literacy, imagination and civilizations are [*sic*] not understood: in this way our whole society is . . . illiterate. . . .

"Illiterate" may seem too harsh a word here, but it does express the bitterness others, too, feel about how some of the most essential values in literature have been slighted, sometimes by those ostensibly allied to literature's champions. Referring harshly to some experts on "reading skills," the following expresses that bitterness:

> The lack of interest in literature displayed by many of the experts points to severely limited aims for education in reading

> and for all education. Titles and recurrent phrases reveal the more serious purposes: "reading in a changing society," or "for effective living," or "for keeping abreast of the times," or to "cope with the challenges of the coming decade," or for "child development," or to meet children's "interests" and "needs," or for "maturity." Again, the terms are less disturbing—though their cliché quality is almost unbearable—than the silences and gestures that accompany their use. Those who talk of adjusting to the "times" and a "changing society" betray little awareness that societies have always been changing, that the times may be out of joint, that our present society may be progressing toward nightmare. A survey of the qualities of "mature readers" includes fashionable names for nearly every intellectual and emotive value in the catalogue, with little stress on the value of knowing one's self and of cherishing the inner life. What has been known historically as the life and care of the soul has all but vanished. . . .

Many might be surprised at this vehemence against such phrases as "meeting children's needs," but the vehemence derives from a judgment: the true distinction of literature has been neglected. Its defenders are too timid: meaning grows from relation; the trying out of relations is the mind's function; literature embodies that function, invites it, induces its cumulative effects. In the view presented, literature through being menaced requires a fuller assertion: in literature the phenomena of consciousness are freed for mutual enhancement; this reinforced internal effect is to be paid attention to, trusted for discoveries. Rules, traditions, religions, laws, and sciences have grown from the accumulated sensations of individuals. Speaking and writing bring about creation. To put it another way, there is a power inherent in literature even apart from the already achieved ideas and feelings of the writer and reader; beliefs and values come into being through the process embodied in enjoying and making literature. Not only does literature carry, reinforce, and illustrate beliefs, values, and ideas—lit-

erature (the process of making it and reading it) creates those values, beliefs, and ideas. Achievement of human coherence as in literature and art is as essential for man's higher intellectual life as breathing is for his physical life.

Current Importance Attached to Maintaining the Creative Life

Many have asserted the difficulty people today have in maintaining the creative portion of their lives. Suzanne Langer, after saying that we all live in necessity and try for grace, says: "There are relatively few people today who are born to an environment which gives them spiritual support. Only persons of some imagination and effective intelligence can picture such an environment and deliberately seek it. They are the few who feel drawn to some realm of reality that contains their ultimate life symbols and dictates activities which may acquire ritual value." Considered as necessary for this function, the literature in our lives today more than ever before lags behind the need for it. Artists attempt the closing of the gap felt between the conditions of our lives and the needs of our souls. Literature helps to effect this closure, "the verbal expression of the meaning of this world by poets who have grown up in it and perceive or guess, warn or challenge, where it is going." The whole area between the chaos experience offers us and the stability a healthy being must achieve has to be bridged. In some periods the bridge is more difficult to achieve, and our time is one of those. Literature is vitally involved in the achievement of this connection between the individual and his world.

Crossing Barriers into Literature Today

The foregoing may do little more than reassert Arnold Bennett's "literature is first and last a means of life"; but the problem is to assert as accurately and helpfully as possible what this felt value is, so that teachers may cleave to it and students benefit by it. Explicitness and care are needed, for in terms of how values are identified today literature does open into a strange realm:

> Behind the writing and the reading of all good literature lie a number of extraordinary assumptions. The literary student takes them for granted, but perhaps should consider them more and remind himself of their extra-ordinariness. The student of society can certainly benefit from looking at them. Why *should* men try to "re-create" their personal and social world? Why should they—as well as analyzing it, probing it, generalizing about it, taking it to pieces, finding its component parts—have felt moved to "make it again"?

This odd impulse, or craving, commands extreme allegiances:

> Such activities are what distinguish us as beings, essentially, from the beasts—the use of language, consciousness, and expression to apprehend and communicate our common experience, so that each may escape from his isolation and recognize those common elements including concepts and values on which morals and civilization may be based, and by which our living may be enriched and guided.

A readiness to enter this realm of functioning consciousness is apparently more important than any amount of forced reading, and this readiness is sometimes hard to induce, in practical people. Something of the difficulty is reflected in a recent study that reports "two disquieting tendencies" in persons who had difficulty in entering literature. One was unwillingness to admit problems of comprehension, and the other was a tenacious holding on to mistaken notions, once they were expressed: "The study demonstrates again and again the importance of helping students learn to evaluate their impressions and to weigh evidence in the terms presented by the author." As always, good readers practice what literature lives by—openness, tentativeness, adjustability, progressions in thought in terms of the experience offered on the page; but the poor readers exemplify an epidemic characteristic of our time—unwillingness to enter that realm. They are literalists in life and—thereby—drowners in the elements of literature.

III

ISSUES

IN THE DEFENSE OF LITERATURE

Even among themselves, and even within themselves individually, teachers and other practitioners in literature continually stumble over an issue too complex for easy solution and too recurrent and important to neglect—the issue of content versus art. On the one hand we try to engage directly with students' needs. At its extreme this impulse could lead to evaluating literature for the topics, the social studies elements available in it. Perhaps the direction might lead so far as to require concentration, not on characters or places or issues which did not really exist, but on history, science, criticism, case studies. And conceivably one might find the best possible story for an individual reader in a close account of a character, himself, in his own neighborhood, undergoing his own experiences.

At the other extreme is the impulse to gauge literature only by some other element, an aesthetic element: in the sustained universe of art the breaks and frustrations of actuality are blended into enhanced emotional surges and tones; any particular included is allowed only for its contribution to an effect held before the reader as an intensified experience, not as any content useful for practical guidance.

Many in teaching have accommodated to this issue, but it continues to echo, and sometimes alarmingly:

> Academic instruction is increasingly given over to "problem-solving" in emulation of the sciences. This has affected lit-

erary studies, giving them a more sociological center and postponing or dismissing questions of enjoyment and the sources of enjoyment in favor of questions of the relation of literature to its society.

As funds become available in support of literary studies, e. g., National Endowment in the Humanities, it is very probable that because of the nature of the grant-awarding mechanism, more and more graduate work in literature will be designed to answer specific questions of historical, sociological, or bibliographical intent.

In short, literature will move off of its new critical center, but not onto a more general concern for audience and author as well as work; rather it will be studied as a quasi-scientific problem.

What is at issue here should be faced squarely, for it is divisive. For many, maximum learning—anywhere—occurs when solid, relevant, factual material is delivered effectively. For them, literature is appropriate if it accomplishes that kind of practical communication. For others, that formula is inappropriate. Those who reject the "practical" view feel themselves involved with their subject, sometimes even victims of it, not just receivers of its distributive benefits. There is a need to have some term, some handy way of identifying the issue, and probably the means of distinction is more needed on the side of art. The claim for art is that the life of the mind requires its own immediate experiences, and those experiences may come out of what are apparently the wildest range of potentials: no social or physical environment can limit the play of art impulses. Not what is there but what is done with what is there, is crucial. Whatever the intention when spinning a yarn, or forming a poem, or constructing a play, the engagement with experience on terms of maximizing its significance is itself the important factor which enlivens creative thought. The arts, through imagination, make us "have experience more vivid, more intense, and more

satisfactorily shaped than any experience we can ordinarily (or perhaps ever) create for ourselves alone."

Those who lean to the practical, the content, side in the argument may grant some importance to art, but they reveal in their more central judgments that their true allegiances go elsewhere; their values must find a basis other than unaided experience. On the aesthetic side of the argument, even moral questions may be based on feelings alone; value judgments depend on human emotions; even finding a truth is a process of attaining a certain kind of satisfaction.

Literature grows in this tangle. A reader brings along an elaborated self when he meets a work; the work, however, cannot be judged merely in the light of prior values—it is itself a source. A reader does not stay the same. This creative function is set forth in an essay significantly entitled "The Informed Vision: An Essay on Science Education." The author asserts that societies specialize in part through adjustment to environment, but partly in individual, creative ways:

> Part of this specialization is creation rather than adaptation, the elaboration of a way of life beyond evident necessity, including much that is expressive and ornamental. A well-ordered society manages, in one or another of many ways, to hold up before itself and to dramatize, to celebrate, the means and manners of its own life. We have many expressions of this sense of involvement and commitment, this condition of happiness. One is to speak of being at home in the world. This means, of course, that we very well understand the opposite condition of non-involvement, the many moods of alienation. But even this understanding is elaborated in myths and metaphysics. Part of coming to terms, of being at home, is in the sheer familiarity of the environment and in the sureness with which one lives and walks there.

In describing this sense of "being at home," and in identifying it

with a willingness to accept human perception and feeling as important for even the most exalted sweeps of thought, the author relates man's situation to a familiar theme in literature: "The Greek dramatists defined the sin of *hubris*, the sin of men who dared to be more than men, to go beyond man's place in the fixed order of things. 'Being at home' for them was not only a state of assurance and familiarity, but of residence at a literal cosmographic and moral address."

Another declaration for the primacy of feeling, emotion, in response to literature comes from Henri Bergson; he says he wanted "to protest once more against the substitution of concepts for things, and against what I have been calling the socialization of the truth":

> It is true, lectures on the work of a great writer may be of use in making it better understood and better appreciated. Even then it is necessary for the pupil to have begun to like it and consequently to understand it. That is equivalent to saying that the child will first have to reinvent it, or in other words, appropriate to a certain extent the inspiration of the author. . . . The intelligence will later add shades of meaning. But shade and color are nothing without design. Before intellection properly so-called, there is the perception of structure and rhythm. . . .
>
> It is wrong to treat it [this process] as an artistic accomplishment. Instead of coming at the end of one's studies, like an ornament, it should be at the beginning and throughout, as a support. Upon it we should place all the rest, if we did not yield here again to the illusion that the main thing is to discourse on things and that one knows them sufficiently when one knows how to talk about them. But one knows, one understands only what one can in some measure reinvent.

Teachers of English live amidst these arguments and often find it enticing to claim many distinctive values for literature; but when there is need to justify their work in the face of aggressive claims from other subjects, it is tempting to slight the intricate and tentative appeals of art. It is easier to argue for the value of language ability in maintaining the democratic way of life than it is to explain or present convincingly the immediate increments to be derived from literature. Improvement in speaking and writing, for persuasion, may just heighten public contention, but power with the language can improve one's competitive position, and that may have more appeal than the experience literature offers. And reading too may be transformed into a chore in the service of success, rather than remaining the welcome opportunity that is its true distinction. We English instructors easily merge into the millrace:

> Growth of facility in reading is a continuous process. . . . It increases in complexity and in demands upon the reader as his intellectual horizons broaden, as his problems become more involved, and as the materials which he reads assume greater difficulty in each successive state of his development. The necessity for continuous and constructive teaching of reading to all young people at all levels of the school system . . . is, therefore, patent. . . .

Some of these spirals of effort could mean that "advanced" work in English advances farther and farther from the essential experience literature has to offer; "higher" levels of education may be drafting readers away from enjoyment and hence away from participation in literature—may be depriving our most promising students of literature's most valuable gifts. Only certain "disadvantaged" groups might continue to receive what "superior" students were no longer allowed to enjoy. G. Robert Carlsen faces this possibility when he speaks of how we often hound students through dull sessions on details—violating the *alive* element in our subject. He points out that

"English" was put into the curriculum for "mental discipline" in the late nineteenth century, and he goes on: ". . . many question seriously whether classes in English at present accomplish the objectives they profess. To do so, we must give up our belief that our subject content automatically liberalizes, and must redirect it toward the real ends we seek. The burden of the proof is on us."

Part of that burden derives from our confusion about what is essential in any one reader's experience in literature. Often we set forth a formal, objective body of materials which a student is to master. And we then make allowance for the existence, also, of individual reactions. This defensive formulation is probably not sufficient. In literature the human response, the individual response, is crucial; it is the ground for all else: truths, traditions, religions, laws grow from the immediate responses induced, and blended, and modulated in the work. A section in *Freedom and Discipline in English* demonstrates the effect it takes to assert both kinds of value in literature:

> Some works may indeed grow richer with the passage of time and the accretion of human experience, but the critic's goal is always to get back as close as possible to the original.
>
> This does not imply, of course, that the reader's response to a work is unimportant, but the fact is that what a work means and what it means to him may be quite different things. He may read, or see, a play in which the leading character reminds him vividly of his father, and he may be so moved that for him this play may seem greater than *King Lear* or *Oedipus the King*. Such personal associations are inevitable at one time or other, and there is nothing wrong with them.
>
> The question is primarily one of the relevance of the reader's reaction to a work of literary art—relevance not only to his own experience and background, but to the intrinsic qualities of the work and the general experience of mankind.

Not all the student's and teacher's attention should be devoted to the formal elements of the literary work; some concern must be devoted to those social, political, or moral issues which are raised by a thoughtful reading of it.

Literature is a fine art, and its formal and artistic elements must not be neglected, but its subject matter is human. The humanity often speaks out, in a play or poem or novel, so prominently that inexperienced readers are unaware of anything else. Good teaching will make them aware of what else there is, and how important it is, without sacrificing or submerging that important human response.

We may not be able to carry water on both shoulders this way. Anxious to validate our subject, we have claimed for it a place among the exacting studies presumably stabilized in a realm more secure than the human. But we may have to accept the idea that the human experiences that get play in literature provide its only validation. At this stage of discussion among members of our profession, it is probably impossible to sort out the strands of our confusion. If the literary imagination brings into being certain prevalent ideas, notions, traditions—then do those created concepts exist as objects for study and further development in a social-studies context? Does a historical study of them belong in literature class? Do the concepts themselves now have independent life best explored by analytical treatment? Do we weaken literature if we do not pursue our subject historically and philosophically? Or do we neglect our real material if we follow literary analysis into its "centrifugal" margins of formal criticism?

IV

ISSUES IN THE TEACHING OF LITERATURE

Quality and Quantity in Reading

Even brief consideration will reveal that the two words *reading* and *literature* may diverge much more than is commonly realized. The amount of reading may be increased without any improvement or increment in the effects linked to literature. Because the results of reading depend on a number of factors, relating to both quantity and quality, we may need as many words for reading as the Eskimos have for snow. In an article on "Development of Taste in Literature" Nila Banton Smith asserts progress in the amount of reading done by school children, but adds: "Are we making equal progress—any progress—in regard to *what* they read?" And in "Book Reading and the Reading of Books" Reuben Brower analyzes some distinctions which loom when the quality of the reading process itself is balanced among the elements to be considered.

Teachers work constantly in light of this complexity. The quality of the literature is one of the factors crucial to educational efforts; but the reading of literature requires an immediacy of involvement in which the reader reacts with a whole self. He does not just accept others' judgments, but participates and realizes for himself the bases for judgments. Richard S. Alm identifies this quality of response, and his conclusion is that the teacher must be caught up in a certain degree of intensity in his own relation to literature; without this quality the teacher "can only be a kind of carpenter in a classroom,

never an artist. . . . Students in the carpenter's classroom may learn certain facts, have certain experiences with literature, but literature for them, unless by accident, can bring no goose flesh, no glimpses of glory."

Finding, Inducing, and Recognizing Good Literature

The academic community finds itself involved in the production and recognition of current literature; and teachers are becoming more aware of this part of their influence. Walter Ong succinctly puts this responsibility.

> The present intimate effect of academic activity on literary production presents new problems, moral problems, which we are far from even stating satisfactorily, let alone solving. If academic activity is directly influencing much writing today, what responsibility does it have to society to develop writing programs suitable for mankind and for individual men? . . .
>
> The role of scholarly activity in influencing production extends far beyond that of the midwife, presiding over literary works at their birth. Scholarly activity today has a direct effect on sales. . . .

Brief quotations can not convey the vistas in this article, but even in these references the teacher of literature can glimpse further aspects of the educator's influence. The discoveries and preferences of scholars and teachers—their part as carriers of the critical standards of the community—will accumulate inevitably toward very influential statements of acceptance and judgment. Arrival at prevailing judgments stems from opinion and exchange, which constantly test and modify any kind of "canon" of literary works in a society. The existence of change does not destroy the moving significance of such a canon, but does point up the part played by the academic community—its insufficiently realized shaping of its culture.

Teachers, even in their simplest activities in this area of influence, find themselves with flourishing allies: American Library Association, state library associations, American Book Publishers Council, Modern Language Association, many current guides to reading, and a host of steadily influential programs for recognizing and encouraging good reading, as in large organizations like the Junior Chamber of Commerce, Boys Clubs of America, Camp Fire Girls, Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, and the National Congress of Parents and Teachers.

Indulgence for "Low" Materials

Educators, no matter how urgent about qualitative improvements, find themselves conspicuously and perhaps even notoriously involved with what the more austere would call inferior materials. Outsiders find it hard to see that an attempt for high standards may very well link with use of the inferior, once the nature of education is examined: reading, like other experiences, has levels which open out toward its full potential. The point of the whole effort is to help the student upward by attainable degrees. This concern not to stall the student shows up in the writings of Nancy Larrick, who carefully explains that the recognition and fostering of even feeble manifestations may be decisively important in teaching. She points out that reading like other human accomplishments yields its best only to some persons and under certain conditions: education seeks to induce that best encounter by bringing the student into his most ready stance. In her view, liberated, confident people take to books and art; a certain degree of personal momentum is necessary. If a person is made to feel helpless or inferior, if he is imposed upon by distractions, he will miss the vigorous involvement essential to the literary experience. Hence the teacher helps the student to establish a self capable of responding. The student's curiosity, his impulse—no matter how small at first—to participate, and in particular his joining with others in simply *talking about* his responses—these active connections with his surroundings must be cultivated if he is to extend his life into the area of richness which reading and writing embody.

The way a student meets the experience of reading is crucially important: he brings his questions and discoveries into action in language and thus merges into literature. It is awareness of this essential engagement which distinguishes a teacher's understanding about literature and makes a teacher appear to have contradictory impulses, one an urge for literature of quality and the other an indulgence of small, tentative, slight accomplishment as a reader comes to life.

This combined urgency and acceptance is expressed by Muriel Crosby in terms of the invitational quality of teaching; the classroom, she says, is for "full flowering of personality" in a "climate which fosters freedom to explore, discover, and dream—opportunities to share emotions, thoughts, and ideas—skills which conserve rather than squander the creative powers of children."

Teachers have been ridiculed at times for their "softness" in accepting ideas, views, and beginnings of thought; but rather than apologize the educator may accept the charge. Literature and the experiencing of it live by an openness to tentative views; every temporary prejudice or glimpse must be ready to yield to a new one if a reader is to continue to discover as he reads. Literature brings possibilities forward; its sustaining effect is to offer a continuing process of discovery, not a shutting off of new glimpses. The reader must feel adequate; his life in the work before him depends on real involvement; he cannot continue to participate if he is scorned or exploited. And the teaching of literature thrives in this "favorable climate" of regard.

Literature and Composition

Usually without bothering to explain their assumptions, teachers in English live by the interaction they feel between reading widely and well and writing freely and effectively. This connection is bluntly put by Peter Caws: ". . . good writing comes from good reading, a facility in the language from an immersion in the literature." He goes on to attack analysis as a way of learning to write, saying that the process of

using language is itself productive of enhanced mental life; to turn from that flowing experience to an analysis of language—from style to grammar, from reading to linguistics, from literature to exercises—is to abandon the process which embodies and induces the life of literature:

> It is much easier, and takes a much less intense and varied acquaintance with the language, to judge that something is written correctly or incorrectly than to judge whether it is written well or badly. The teacher of composition falls back on the canons of correct usage when he marks the sentence faults and comma splices of his hundred themes; he is generally much less clear about the canons of style. . . .

The relation between composition and literature is asserted from both directions. Turned in the one direction, we see fully adequate reading of literature as equivalent to creative work in itself:

> At the highest stage of literary appreciation, the reader responds with delight, knows why, chooses discriminatingly, and relies on his own judgment. His reading has range and power and, in this sense, is an extension of the creative process which produced the work of literature.

Or turned in the other direction, we see literature as inducing the kind of writing which itself becomes creative work: "Nothing lends itself so completely to the understanding of the vagaries of human personality as the study of literature, and our readings become the springboard for the plunge into self-analysis." As a result of that plunge, students can see characters as personalities with problems to solve; discussions relate the literature to relevant personal experiences, and each resulting composition becomes—in the words of Lorine D. Hyer, who practices this method—"an instrument on which the pupil piped his own groping tune. . . . A course of this type defies pedagogical 'evaluation.' The human equation has never lent itself to yardstick measurements."

Internal or External Reference in the Study of Literature

An issue identified earlier—literature as content or literature as art—appears again in terms of classroom practice: whether to dwell on structure in a literary work, and on its contemporary significance as viewed by an immediate reader, or whether to fix a literary work in terms of historical, established reference points. The first emphasis is evident in the continuing effect of "the new criticism." The influence of that view is also apparent in today's focus on current literature at the expense of more established works. The other approach—the analysis of literature as a part of a certain culture—is evident in area studies programs and in efforts to integrate "humanities."

These diverse emphases will occasion debate and experiment for some time, and it is a rare teacher who can be comfortable for long without modulating from either extreme, under certain circumstances. It may be that the literary imagination as source may be more fully accepted, so that historical studies will recognize the creative genesis of their materials, while studies concerned with the more contemporary interests and with structure may admit more easily the relevance of earlier creations in the experiencing of the new.

Special Demands on the Teacher of Literature

Besides the more publicized issues in the study and enjoyment of literature, teachers find themselves in immediate confrontation with issues either too pervasive to pin down or too complex to communicate to outsiders. One such issue is in the demand literature continually makes for involvement:

> Literature engages the personality, the self. Because it does so, like all serious art, it embodies a threat. It has been maintained that, from the psychoanalytic point of view, a literary artist (and *mutatis mutandis*, other artists, too) operates precisely by "playing" with a threat to man's psychological organization and, in his work of art, by mastering the threat for

himself and for his readers. This is the power of tragedy and comedy both, and of everything in between.

Walter Ong, carrying on the above analysis, asserts that a teacher who is insecure cannot operate freely enough to explore and profit by the essential qualities of literature; in particular, he will be afraid to operate easily and creatively with the day-to-day content of his own life and his students' lives. In short, full involvement with the hazards, the reckless easy commitment with varying views and flowing potentials, of the best literature may be beyond most of us, simply from our insecurity as human beings. But it is this very openness and availability which distinguishes literature at its best: the reader has a continuous opportunity to live in the material and to derive from it the maximum invitation for further realizations in his own potentials. Any treatment which inhibits that participation is destructive of literature's gift.

This involvement of the reader requires of him a certain imaginative flexibility which is the basis of and the result of free exercise. A reader brings all of his feelings and commitments, but he must be ready to operate with them in a realm given over to new and perhaps even temporarily reckless trials. The spread between what he *is*—the feelings, beliefs, experiences of his own—and what he can *understand* or entertain is the measure of his human distinction; literature induces a reach beyond the given. The ability to operate in this area of tentative commitment is crucial; and as one study indicates, "the student with psychological abnormalities is likely to be a totally uncritical or an ultra-critical reader." It is this range of welcomed compatibility during the reading process which helps to distinguish literature from "tool" subjects: even the most distinctive ideas and principles must be hazarded for free treatment, inversion, subversion, enhancement, syncopation, by the mind in operation. One hazard to such freedom, outside censorship, blindly violates this need for freedom exactly where freedom is needed for the achievement of stability—where

values are formed. And probably more pervasive in importance is the kind of interior censorship imposed by stupidity, laziness, and prejudice.

Teachers, of course, endure their full share of these short-circuit responses. Even the Socratic method may turn into an imposition of planned results, because of our prevalent need to operate from the knowing stance rather than the searching, roaming, adventurous attitude natural to the best reading experiences. Literature provides a meeting ground for student and educator, but literature is not at its best when presented as achieved knowledge. The temptation is to instruct, but that violates what literature offers. A further temptation is to teach—to lead into social studies, values, personality improvements —but even that function assumes a subject given over to already established materials. At its best literature provides an occasion for exploring and professing: student and teacher enter together into the realm of experiencing at maximum intensity and liveliness the influences that provide their own rewards and meanings.

Literature: Practicality and Worth

Because it lives by its freedom and adaptability, literature is vulnerable, in circumstances that lead a society to intensify its immediate demands. The temptation of the grownup, purposeful society is to put the young strictly to the task of attaining already identified goals. This kind of directive education may inhibit the impulses, the ranging imaginations, the fountains of originality on which later action, in all its content, scope, force, and enjoyment, would depend. Teachers have discovered that their greatest resource is that very reactive power so easily destroyed in their students; and there has come to be a constant struggle to maintain for students the fullest possible freedom for individual, fully adaptable development into an adulthood most consonant with the potential of the self. Literature, which appeals to and depends on the individual's reactive powers, is in this view a tremendously precious part of the world of the young. A realization of its peculiar and

enduring importance, along with its vulnerability to misguided use or neglect in our times, is essential for those who would maintain literature through a complex interval of trial.

Helping to induce a climate for literary production, helping to assess that production and circulate it in attractive form and in the best pattern of dispersal, providing the best programs and sequences and procedures for readers at different levels of development and ability—these endeavors are shared by librarians, authors, publishers, and teachers—and by all who realize literature's worth for our day.

Notes

Page i

"Friends to This Ground," *Hamlet*, Act I, Scene 1.

Pages 2 & 3

" . . . the problem of expression is becoming . . .": Walter J. Ong, S.J. *In the Human Grain* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1967), pp. 33-34. Chapter ii of this book, from which the present quotation and a subsequent quotation here are taken, appeared earlier as "Synchronic Present: The Academic Future of Modern Literature in America," *American Quarterly*, XIV, 2 (Summer 1962), 239-259.

Pages 3 & 4

Numbers 1, 3, and 5: G. Robert Carlsen, in unpublished proceedings of the Commission on Literature. Number 6: Muriel Crosby expresses this point, its substance, in her "Foreword" for *Poetry in the Elementary Classroom*, by Flora J. Arnstein (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1962).

Page 4

The questions on the future of literature are posed by Larzer Ziff, in unpublished proceedings of the Commission on Literature.

Pages 5 & 6

Richard Hoggart, "Literature and Society," *American Scholar*, XXXV, 2 (Spring 1966), 288-289.

Page 6

"The literary imagination makes it possible . . .": Robert B. Heilman, "Literature and Growing Up," *English Journal*, XLV, 6 (September 1956), 304.

Pages 6 & 7

List of objectives: G. Robert Carlsen, "English and the Liberal Arts Tradition in the High School," *English Journal*, XLIV, 6 (September 1955), 323-329.

Page 7

Mr. Carlsen's further analysis about the influence of stories appears in his article "Behind Reading Interests," *English Journal,* XLIII (January 1954), 7-12.

"Though a sociologist may say . . .": Reuben A. Brower, "Book Reading and the Reading of Books," *Daedalus,* XC (Winter 1961), 14.

Page 8

"In this book . . .": David Holbrook, *English for the Rejected* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), pp. 10-11.

". . . good art teaching . . .": Helen Huus, "Development of Taste in Literature in the Elementary Grades," *Development of Taste in Literature* (Champaign, Ill.: National Council of Teachers of English, 1962-3), pp. 12, 24.

Page 9

". . . creative work is a means . . .": David Holbrook, *op. cit.,* pp. 196 ff.

Pages 9 & 10

"The lack of interest . . .": Reuben Brower, *loc. cit.*

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Suzanne Langer: cited by Virginia Haseltine, "Morris Graves, A Retrospective," University of Oregon Museum of Art, Eugene, 1966.

". . . the verbal expression of the meaning of this world . . .": This quotation, along with ideas in the immediate context of the quotation: Josephine Miles, "Reading Poems," *What to Say about a Poem* (Champaign, Ill.: National Council of Teachers of English, 1963), p. 20.

Page 12

"Behind the writing and the reading . . .": Richard Hoggart, *op. cit.,* p. 289.

"Such activities are what distinguish us . . .": David Holbrook, *The Secret Places* (University: University of Alabama Press, 1965), p. 36.

"The study demonstrates again and again . . .": James R. Squire, *The Responses of Adolescents While Reading Four Short Stories* (Champaign, Ill.: National Council of Teachers of English, 1964), p. 39.

Pages 13 & 14

"Academic instruction is increasingly . . .": Larzer Ziff, proceedings of the Commission on Literature.

Pages 14 & 15

[The arts make us] "have experience more vivid . . .": Edwin H. Cady, "The Role of Literature for Young People Today," *English Journal*, XLIV (May 1955), 269.

Page 15

"Part of this specialization . . .": David Hawkins, "The Informed Vision: An Essay on Science Education," *Daedalus*, XCIV (Summer 1965), 538 ff.

Page 16

"It is true, lectures on the work . . .": Henri Bergson, *The Creative Mind* (New York: The Philosophical Library, 1946), pp. 101 ff; also available in paperback (Totowa, N.J.: Littlefield, Adams & Co,. 1965).

Page 17

"Growth of facility in reading . . .": *Basic Aims for English Instruction* (Champaign, Ill.: National Council of Teachers of English, 1942), p. 5.

Page 18

". . . many question seriously . . .": G. Robert Carlsen, "English and the Liberal Arts Tradition in the High School," *op. cit.*, p. 329.

Pages 18 & 19

"Some works may indeed grow richer . . .": Commission on English, *Freedom and Discipline in English* (New York: College Entrance Examination Board, 1965), p. 71.

Page 19

"If the literary imagination . . .": the questions which end this section derive from a critique of the subject offered by Mr. David Fowler, University of Washington.

Page 20

"Are we making equal progress . . .": Nila Banton Smith, "Introduction: Why Should We Develop Taste in Literature?" *Development of Taste in Literature* (Champaign, Ill.: National Council of Teachers of English, 1962-3), p. 3.

Pages 20 & 21

[The teacher] "can only be a kind of carpenter . . .": Richard S. Alm, "Goose Flesh and Glimpses of Glory," *English Journal*, LII (April 1963), 268.

"The present intimate effect . . .": Walter J. Ong, S.J., *op. cit.*, p. 36.

Page 22

Passages about cultivating the student's responses: Nancy Larrick, *A Parent's Guide to Children's Reading* (New York: Pocket Books and Doubleday, 1964), *passim.*

Page 23

The classroom is for "full flowering of personality . . .": Muriel Crosby, "Foreword," *Poetry in the Elementary Classroom,* by Flora J. Arnstein (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1962), p. v.

Flora J. Arnstein discusses this "favorable climate" in the book cited immediately above, p. 18.

". . . good writing comes from good reading . . .": Peter Caws, "The Pyramid and the Black Box," *The Little Magazine and Contemporary Literature* (New York: Modern Language Association, 1966), p. 92.

Page 24

"It is much easier . . .": Peter Caws, *op. cit.,* pp. 88-89.

"At the highest stage of literary appreciation . . .": Angela M. Broening, "Development of Taste in Literature in the Senior High School," *Development of Taste in Literature* (Champaign, Ill.: National Council of Teachers of English, 1962-3), p. 38. The passage cited is footnoted to Margaret J. Early, "Stages of Growth in Literary Appreciation," *English Journal,* XLIX (March 1960), 161-167.

"Nothing lends itself so completely . . .": Lorine D. Hyer, "Life Adjustment through Literature," *English Journal,* XL (January 1951), 28 ff.

Pages 25 & 26

"Literature engages the personality . . .": Walter J. Ong, S.J., "Literature, Threat and Conquest," *College English,* XXVII (May 1966), 622.

Page 26

". . . the student with psychological abnormalities . . .": William Eller and Robert Dykstra, "Persuasion and Personality: Readers' Predisposition as a Factor in Critical Reading," *Critical Reading, an Introduction* (Champaign, Ill.: National Council of Teachers of English, 1959), p. 26.

In addition to the writers noted above, many others and particularly members of the Commission on Literature entered the text by dialogue and by various sidelong influences. Notable for extended suggestions which helped form the document without emerging in local phrasing were communications from Harry T. Moore, Wayne Booth, and Arlin Turner. The first paragraph of part II relies on very helpful correspondence with G. Robert Carlsen.

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WILLIAM STAFFORD brings to his work with the Commission on Literature a diversity of gifts and breadth of experience. Having worked at various times in forestry, soil conservation, farming, and in oil refineries, Mr. Stafford has since 1948 been a teacher of English and the humanities at Lewis and Clark College, Portland, Oregon. His B.A. and M.A. are from the University of Kansas, his Ph.D. from The State University of Iowa.

Mr. Stafford's writing has won for him a place of distinction among contemporary poets. The National Book Award for poetry (for his second collection of poems, *Traveling Through the Dark*, 1962), *Poetry's* Union League Prize, fellowships, grants, and other short story and poetry prizes are some of the honors Mr. Stafford has received. His poetry and some prose have appeared in more than thirty periodicals, including *The Atlantic, Harper's Magazine, Saturday Review, The New Yorker, New Republic, The Hudson Review, Poetry, Kenyon Review, Colorado Quarterly, Botteghe Oscure* and *Paris Review*. In 1966 Mr. Stafford's third collection of poems, *The Rescued Year*, was published by Harper and Row.

Mr. Stafford with the Commission on Literature made special arrangements for the Houston Festival of Contemporary Poetry at the annual meeting of the National Council of Teachers of English. As spokesman for the proceedings of the Commission on Literature, Mr. Stafford has combined the interests and sensibilities of poet, scholar, and teacher, giving the Commission an articulate voice and the Council a unique document.